

To you who was once mine,

The sky is painted a soft, mellow blue as I write. A few drops of white, and it would be pale blue—your favorite color. The birds are chirping merrily, perhaps at the long-awaited arrival of Spring. The bright sun, albeit filtered by the shade of oak trees, still shone brightly upon my face as I looked up, trying to take everything in. I'm sorry I wasn't able to greet you properly, to exchange the ups and downs during my absence, and to congratulate you on your marriage. Let me write to you how I feel, in shame that I have not a heart strong enough to withstand looking at you, knowing that your heart doesn't belong to me.

It had been four years since I left this town for university abroad. I couldn't come back. Travelling by sea is simply too time-consuming and costly. How I wish I could simply fly across the sky and be by your side. The thought of being back here, the land that raised me, brings bittersweet feelings. The humidity, the uneven roads, and the leisure of the town. Everything I used to look down upon has become beautiful in retrospect. On that day, my heart raced as I stood in front of the bakery run by your family with large glass windows fogged by the activity of the ovens, towing a large suitcase.

Your voice— I wanted to hear.

Your smile— I wanted to see.

Your hands— I wanted to hold.

Your face that I could once remember so clearly, an ever-replaying scene of you turning around, your hair fluttering across the wind, the side of your face dazzling with evident joy, has since just become another fogged memory, slowly dissipating like sand slipping through the gaps of fingers. No matter how hard I try to palm it, each grain cascades out, slipping beyond my reach. I breathed in and out deeply once more, trying to find the courage to enter. My hands grasped the handle.

*Ding ding...*

The bell's soft chime rang gently near my ears as I opened the aged wooden door. The appetizing and nostalgic smell came hurling back at me. The faint dusting of flour in the air, the comforting whiff of yeast fermenting that I've come to appreciate, and the hints of vanilla and cinnamon used for pastries. Yet nothing came close to overflowing me with tears than your voice. The slight raspy edge to your voice remained as I recalled.

Your beautiful dark eyes slowly widened. Your hair was tied in a neat bun, yet a few strands of hair still ran amok; there was a streak of flour on your face as you smiled from ear to ear.

You were just as loving as I remembered, a burst of energy. You ran from the counter and towards me, giving me a gentle, warm embrace. Just as I was about to wrap my arms around you like old times, you pushed into my chest, creating a noticeable distance between us. Your eyes downcast as you gently played with your fingers... *No...*

I could feel my heart sink. There was a glimmer around your ring finger, a golden glister as your fingers traced the smooth band, twisting it back and forth. Now that I've taken a closer look, you no longer had the same youthful innocence on your face— slight eyebags, faint but telling, rested beneath your eyes, hinting at sleepless nights. The soft glow of youth had given way to something deeper—an edge of weariness, of experience.

*Ah... I see.* I surprised myself at how quickly I accepted everything.

*This was bound to happen.* I told myself.

*A woman like you would obviously attract suitors. I have to smile! I have to congratulate you!* I thought.

Yet the words wouldn't leave my mouth.

My throat felt dry, I couldn't bring myself to look in the eyes of the woman I love dearly.

My mind was blanking. Everything was blurring.

I dashed out of the bakery, the soft, comforting fragrance of bread lingering in my nose.

I was foolish.

Money, fame, ability—everything I chased so desperately in my life. None of it meant a thing if it meant I lost the pleasure to stand by your side, to gently play with your hair as you pressed your head against my chest in slumber, to be the one to hold your hand.

Alas, sweet ifs are never meant to be.

But even as I try to quell the regret in my heart, it beats for you.

So, as farewell, please listen to my final wistful if.

If God were to unbind the intricate threads of fate that brought us here, if I could start from scratch again, I would've never left the warmth that filled my heart when I was the one with you and holding your hands.

I would've never let you go.

How I wish to simply tell you "I love you," I can only entrust to your dearest one to do so for me now.

Thank you for all you've done for me.

Yours ever truly.